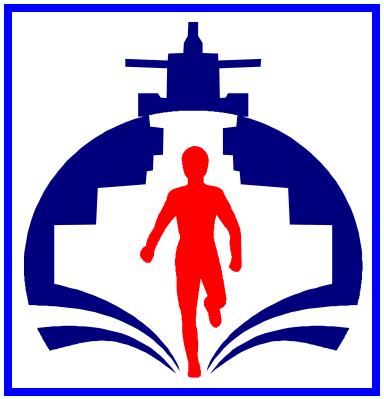
COMBAT STRESS

Mark A. D. Long, Ed.D.
Health Promotion
Navy Environmental Health Center



Combat Stress Defined

A normal response to an abnormal situation

History of Combat Stress

- Seen in every conflict/war

- Called by different names

“Nostalgia”	Civil War
“Shell Shock”	World War
“Exhaustion”	World War
“Combat Exhaustion”	Korean W
“Combat Fatigue”	Vietnam

Epidemiology of Combat Stress

- 1982 - Israeli Army - 1 to 1 ratio of combat stress to wounded in action.
- WWII- Battle of Okinawa - 1 to 2 ratio of combat stress to wounded.
- WWII - European Theatre - 1 to 4 ratio of combat stress to wounded.

Overall average rate is 1 to 3 ratio of combat stress to

Combat Stress Can Occur

- In war.
- In operations other than
- During peacetime trainin
- During disasters.

Common Combat Stress Myths

- He/She is crazy or mentally ill.
- He/She is lazy.
- He/She is a coward.
- He/She won't be able to function in the unit.
- It can't happen to me!

Combat Stress is a natural result of heavy mental and physical work when facing danger under difficult conditions*

***1994 Leaders Manual for Combat Stress Control, U. S. Army**

Combat Stress

can happen to anyone!

Common Combat Stress Symptoms*

- Hyperalertness
- Fear, Anxiety
- Irritability, Anger
- Grief, Self Doubt

*From Field Manual No 22-51, U.S. Army, 29 Sep 94, Combat Stress Behaviors Leaders Manual for Combat Stress Control

Combat Stress Warning

- Physical Stress Complaints
- Inattention, Carelessness
- Loss of Confidence
- Loss of Hope and

Warning Signs

- Impaired duty performance
- Freezing, immobility
- Erratic actions
- Terror, panic
- Total exhaustion, apathy
- Loss of skills

Treatment of Combat Stress

Three Effective Principles

PROXIMITY - **Treat in close proximity.**

IMMEDIACY - **Treat as soon as possible.**

EXPECTANCY - **Treat with**

Treat Combat Stress With

- Reassuranc
- e
- Rest
- Replenishm
- ent

Treatment of Combat Stress Works!

- 80% of those treated returned to duty*
- If untreated, can become large wartime casualty, and may lead to post traumatic stress disorder

*Goldsmith D.K. (1986)

Contributing Factors to Combat Stress

- **Sudden Exposure - First experience with battle, and life-death ramifications, and shock and fear.**
- **Cumulative Exposure - Added exposure to the dangers, responsibilities and consequences**

Contributing Factors to Combat Stress

Physical Stressors and Stress Symptoms - Factors that reduce the ability to cope especially dehydration and lack of sleep. Also includes - overwork, cold, heat, wetness, noise, poor hygiene, fevers, infections and

Contributing Factors to Combat Stress

Home Front - Recent changes at home (negative or positive) may result in worry and distracted focus.

Lessons Learned

- **Leadership prevents combat stress.**
- **USN/USMC Can reduce combat stress casualties.**
- **Military can**

Prevention of Combat Stress

- Strong Leadership
- Leaders as positive role models
- Provide realistic and tough training

Prevention of Combat Stress

- Promote Unit Cohesion
- Promote Unit Morale and Espirit de corps
- Educate about Combat Stress
- Physically fit

At the Front - Prevention of Combat Stress

> Focus on mission and success

> Communicate - keep everyone informed about -

- expectations
- unexpected
- situation
- delays
- rumors

At the Front - Prevention of Combat Stress

- Care for troops -
  - Drink and eat.
  - Sleep, sleep, and more sleep.
  - Clean up - selves, weapons, gear.
  - Provide good shelter and cover.
  - Monitor for problems.
  - Keep busy (maintenance, and recreation if not resting).

Combat Stress can be prevented and effectively managed!